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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 000670

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AF/S FOR B. NEULING
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR C. COURVILLE
AFR/SA FOR E. LOKEN
COMMERCE FOR BECKY ERKUL

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM ZI

SUBJECT: ZVOBGO ON STASIS, PROSPECTS FOR CHANGE IN ZANU-PF

REF: (A) HARARE 266 (B) 05 HARARE 1290

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i., Eric T. Schultz under Section 1
.4 b/d

Summary

¶1. (C) ZANU-PF businessperson and provincial official Eddie Zvobgo told poloff June 1 that the ruling party would remain in disarray and paralyzed by succession tensions until Mugabe passed from the scene. However, he did not believe Mugabe intended to leave office any time soon. Moreover, neither of the party's competing factions had sufficient strength or courage to press for Mugabe's early retirement. Nor was it realistic to expect any push from ZANU-PF's grass-roots supporters. Zvobgo reiterated that Mugabe's successor would seek re-engagement with the West but cautioned that he/she would have to pay homage to Mugabe's legacy rhetorically and pursue reforms cautiously in order to survive politically.
End Summary.

Succession Strains Still Paralyzing Policy

¶2. (C) The son of Mugabe's greatest intra-party critic, now deceased, Zvobgo cast the ruling party as still paralyzed by the uncertainty of succession. Although succession was on everyone's mind, it continued to be a mum subject officially. Indeed, mistrust within the party and the high stakes involved meant that very few ZANU-PF leaders could even discuss the matter among each other.

¶3. (C) According to Zvobgo, in this largely paranoid environment, the rare policy initiatives and deliberations

that occurred within the party revolved around misguided posturing to curry favor with Mugabe. Zvobgo offered the GOZ's recently announced "Operation Round-up" (ref A) as an example. The GOZ's announced figure of 10,000 in detention was vastly exaggerated, which suggested the media report was deliberate hyperbole from a police official trying to appear responsive to the president.

14. (C) Zvobgo claimed the pending mining and education bills -- each disastrous in his view -- were also misguided attempts to appeal to Mugabe in the absence of clear policy direction from the top. Zvobgo maintained that Mugabe's refusal to weigh in decisively on such issues underscored his priority on keeping ministers off balance at the expense of national development.

15. (C) For his part, Mugabe continued to exploit these dynamics masterfully, according to Zvobgo. Mugabe had no intention of leaving office and the security of his tenure in office depended on the continued loyalty of the warring Mujuru and Mnangagwa factions. To that end, Mugabe would avoid anointing either as successor while leaving the door open to both. Zvobgo said the aspiring successors were growing impatient but remained unwilling to risk their long-term prospects by challenging Mugabe directly and urging his retirement.

No Push from ZANU-PF Grassroots

16. (C) Zvobgo added that the party's grassroots were no more
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of an impetus for change than its leadership. Though many Zimbabweans embraced capitalism, most remained mired in a feudal culture that revolved around patronage. Zvobgo elaborated that every public rally and private engagement he had with constituents revolved around who could do what for whom. Policies and principles -- much less succession -- were never discussed. None in the party and few outside it questioned the centrality of relationships and patronage to politics. Zvobgo claimed that MDC leaders and supporters were hemmed in by the same constraints.

17. (C) Zvobgo said GOZ agricultural policy, which seemed senseless to outsiders, was best understood in the context of the patronage mentality hard-wired into the Zimbabwean psyche. National production figures were not as important as the appearance of delivering land to one's constituents. Most Zimbabweans resided in rural areas and saw land, more than cattle or other indicia of wealth, as the measure of one's power and prestige. That the system as implemented horribly disadvantaged the vast majority of Zimbabweans was irrelevant to the political elites and grass roots alike.

Post-Succession Reform to be Complicated

18. (C) Looking to the future, Zvobgo cautioned that in his view the country might not change direction upon Mugabe's passing as quickly as many might desire. All Zimbabweans would breathe a sigh of relief on Mugabe's passing, but the leadership -- whoever emerged -- would likely have to continue to orient itself around ZANU-PF's liberation rhetoric. Overt rejection of Mugabe's legacy -- land reform and "anti-colonial" themes -- would be tantamount to political suicide, even for the MDC.

19. (C) Zvobgo asserted that the successor nonetheless would have no choice but to reach out quietly to the West and to embrace reform. Mugabe's successor would have to walk a fine line, outflanking the hardliners rhetorically while pursuing the necessary reforms. Zimbabwe's best hope lay in a &Deng Xiaoping-like8 figure that would cleave to his

predecessor's legacy rhetorically while fundamentally changing Mugabe's policies. Zvobgo urged the West to ignore the rhetoric and give Mugabe's successor a chance when the time came.

Comment

¶10. (C) Zvobgo's closing pitch for patience with a successor was probably intended to lay a future foundation for Joyce Mujuru, still the leading successor candidate from the faction to which Zvobgo is aligned. The Mujurus had seemed to be in the driver's seat in the succession game up until a few months ago. However, Zvobgo's patrons are probably not too happy with the recent signals that Mugabe is rehabilitating their main rival, Emmerson Mnangagwa. For Zvobgo and other keen observers of Zimbabwean politics, Mugabe's continuing to play the two rival factions against each other is the surest sign yet that the octogenarian president is not committed to an early retirement, despite what he's said publicly and despite the hopes of the long-suffering Zimbabwean people.

SCHULTZ